Preface to Narcissus: Or the Lover of Himself[1]

I wrote this Play at the age of eighteen,[2] and I refrained from presenting it as long as I had some regard for reputation as an Author. At last I felt enough courage to publish it, but I will never have enough to say anything about it. Therefore the issue here is not my play but myself.

In spite of my repugnance I must speak about myself; I must either acknowledge the wrongs attributed to me, or I must vindicate myself against them. I sense very well that the weapons will not be evenly matched, because I will be attacked with jokes and I will defend myself with nothing but reasoning: but as long as I convince my adversaries, I care very little about persuading them.[3] While working to deserve my own esteem, I have learned to forego that of others, who, for the most part do very well without mine. But even if it hardly matters to me whether I am well or ill thought of, it does matter to me that no one has the right to think ill of me, and it matters to the truth I have maintained that its defender not be justly accused of having lent his aid to it only out of caprice or vanity without loving and knowing it.

The side that I took in the question I examined several years ago did not fail to make me a multitude of adversaries* who were perhaps more

* I am assured that several people find it bad that I call my adversaries my adversaries, and that seems to me rather believable in a century in which one no longer dares to call anything by its name. I learn also that each of my adversaries complains that I am wasting my time fighting against chimeras when I reply to objections other than his own; which proves to me something I already rather suspected, namely that they don't waste their time in reading or listening to each other. As for myself, this is a trouble that I believed I ought to take and I have read the numerous writings they have published against me, from the first reply with which I was honored to four German sermons one of which begins in roughly this manner: *My brothers, if Socrates returned among us and saw the flourishing state in which the sciences are in Europe, do I say Europe: in Germany; do I say in Germany? in Saxony; do I say Saxony, in Leipzig; do I say in Leipzig? in this University. Then seized with astonishment and penetrated with respect, Socrates would sit down modestly among our schoolboys, and receiving our lessons with humility; with us he would soon lose that ignorance about which he complained so justly.*[4] I have read all that, and have made only a few replies to it; perhaps I have already made too many, but I am very pleased that these Gentlemen have found them agreeable enough to be jealous about preference. For the people who are shocked by the word *adversaries*, I gladly consent to abandon it for them provided they will be so good as to indicate to me another by which I can designate not only all those who have fought my sentiment, whether by writing or, more prudently and more at their ease in the circles of women and wits, where they were very sure that I would not go to defend myself, but also those who today pretend to believe that I do not have adversaries, who at first had found

attentive to the interest of men of letters than to the honor of literature. I had foreseen this and I had rather suspected that their conduct on this occasion would bear witness in my favor more than all my discourses. In effect, they have disguised neither their surprise nor their chagrin at the fact that an Academy showed its integrity so inopportunely. They have not spared against it either indiscreet invective or even falsehoods* to attempt to lessen the weight of its judgment. Nor have I been forgotten in their declamations. Several have undertaken to refute me openly: the wise have been able to see with what force, and the public with what success they have done it. Others who were more clever, knowing the danger of directly combatting demonstrated truths, have skillfully deflected onto my person an attention that should have been given only to my reasons, and the examination of the accusations they have brought against me have caused to be forgotten the more serious accusations that I have brought against them myself. Therefore it is to these that I must reply once and for all.

They claim that I do not believe a word of the truths that I have maintained, and that while demonstrating a proposition I did not fail to believe the opposite. That is to say that I proved such extravagant things that it can be affirmed that I could maintain them only as a game. This is a fine honor they pay to the science which serves as the foundation of all the others; and one should believe that the art of reasoning serves very much for the discovery of the truth when one sees it used successfully to demonstrate follies!

They claim that I do not believe a word of the truths that I have maintained. Without a doubt this is a new and convenient way to respond to unanswerable arguments on their part, to refute even the demonstrations of a Euclid, and everything in the universe that has been demonstrated. It seems to me that those who so rashly accuse me of speaking in contradiction with my thought do not themselves have many scruples about speaking in contradiction with theirs: for they have assuredly found nothing in my Writings or in my conduct which ought to have inspired them with this idea, as I will soon prove; and it is not permissible for them to ignore that as soon as a man speaks seriously, one ought to think that he believes what he says, unless his actions or his

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the replies of my adversaries to be unanswerable, then when I replied, have blamed me for having done so because, according to them, I hadn't been attacked at all. While waiting, they will allow me to continue to call my adversaries my adversaries, for, in spite of the politeness of my century, I am as crude as the Macedonians of Philip.

* One can see in the *Mercury* of August 1752, the disclaimer of the Academy of Dijon on the subject of some writing or other.[5]

discourses belie it. Even that is not always enough to prove that he believes nothing of it.

Thus they can shout as much as they want that while declaring myself against the sciences I spoke against my sentiment. To such a rash assertion, stripped equally of proof and likelihood, I know only one reply. It is short and energetic, and I ask them to consider it as made.

They also claim that my conduct is in contradiction with my principles, and it must not be doubted that they use this second charge to establish the first one; for there are many people who know how to find proofs for what is not. Thus they will say that when one writes music and poetry, it is ungracious to denigrate the fine arts, and that in literature which I pretend to despise, there are a thousand occupations more praiseworthy than that of writing Plays. It is necessary also to reply to this accusation.

First, even if this were granted in all its strictness, I say that it would prove that I behave badly, but not that I do not speak in good faith. If it were permitted to draw from the actions of men the proof of their sentiments, it would be necessary to say that the love of justice is banished from all hearts and that there is not a single Christian on the earth. Show me men who always act consistently with their maxims, and I will pass sentence on mine. Such is the lot of humanity, reason shows us the goal and the passions divert us from it. Even if it were true that I did not act in accordance with my principles, from this alone one would not be right to accuse me of speaking in contradiction to my sentiment, or to accuse my principles of falsehood.

But if I wished to pass sentence on this point, it would suffice for me to compare the periods of time to reconcile things. I have not always had the good fortune to think as I do. Seduced for a long time by the prejudices of my century, I took study for the only occupation worthy of a wise man, I looked at the sciences only with respect and scientists[6] only with admiration.* I did not understand that one can go astray while always demonstrating, or do wrong while always speaking about wisdom. It is only after having seen things from close up that I learned to esteem them for what they were worth; and although in my inquiries I always found, *satis loquentiae, sapientiae parum*,[7] I needed much reflection, much

* Every time I think of my former simple-mindedness, I can't keep myself from laughing. I didn't read a book of Morality or of Philosophy without thinking I saw in it the soul and the principles of the Author. I considered all these serious Writers as modest, wise, virtuous, irreproachable men. I formed angelic ideas of their relations with each other, and I would only have approached the house of one of them as if it were a sanctuary. Finally I saw them, this childish prejudice was dissipated, and it is the only error of which they cured me.

observation and much time to destroy the illusion of all that vain scientific pomp. It is not surprising that, during those times of prejudices and errors when I so much esteemed the quality of being an Author, I sometimes aspired to obtain it for myself. It is in this way that Poems and the majority of other Writings that issued from my pen and among others this little Play were composed. Perhaps it would be harsh to reproach me today for the amusements of my youth, and at least it would be wrong to accuse me of having thereby contradicted principles that were not yet mine. For a long time I have no longer laid any sort of claim to all these things; and to risk giving them to the Public in these circumstances, after having had the prudence to keep them for such a long time, is to say clearly enough that I disdain equally the praise and the blame that they might deserve; for I no longer think as did the Author whose work they are. They are illegitimate children whom one still caresses with pleasure while blushing to be their father, to whom one says the last farewell, and whom one sends to seek their fortune without worrying much about what they will become.[8]

But this is to reason too much according to chimerical assumptions. If I am accused without reason of cultivating literature which I despise, it is not necessary for me to defend myself; for if the fact were true, there would be no inconsistency in it at all. This is what remains for me to prove.

To do so I will follow, according to my customary practice, the simple and easy method that suits the truth. I will establish the state of the question anew, I will set out my sentiment anew, and I will wait to be shown how, based on that exposition, my actions belie my discourses. On their side, my adversaries—who possess the marvelous art of disputing the pro and con on all sorts of subjects—will not remain without a reply. They will begin, according to their customary practice, by establishing a different question according to their whim; they will make me resolve it as it suits them. In order to attack me more conveniently, they will make me reason, not in my manner but in theirs. They will skillfully turn the eyes of the Reader away from the essential object to fix them to the right and to the left; they will battle a phantom and claim to have vanquished me: but I will have done what I ought to do, and I begin.

"Science is good for nothing, and never does anything but harm. It is no less inseparable from vice than ignorance is from virtue. All literate peoples have always been corrupt; all ignorant peoples have been virtuous. In a word, there are no vices except among the learned, nor any virtuous man except one who knows nothing. Therefore there is a way

for us to become decent people again; that is to rush to proscribe science and the learned, to burn our libraries, to close our Academies, our Colleges, our Universities, and to plunge back into all the barbarism of the first centuries."

That is what my adversaries have refuted very well. However I never said nor thought a single word of all that, and nothing can be imagined more opposed to my system than this absurd doctrine which they have the goodness to attribute to me. But the following is what I did say and what has not been refuted at all.

The issue was whether the restoration of the sciences and arts tended to purify our morals.[9]

By showing, as I did, that our morals have not been at all purified* the question was more or less resolved.

But it implicitly contained another more general and more important question about the influence that the cultivation of the sciences must have on the morals of peoples on all occasions. It is this question, of which the first is only a consequence, that I proposed to examine carefully.

I began with the facts, and I showed that morals have degenerated among all the peoples in the world to the extent that the taste for study and letters has spread among them.

This was not enough; for without being able to deny that these things have always proceeded together, one could deny that the one brought about the other. Thus I applied myself to showing this necessary connection. I showed that the source of our errors on this point comes from the fact that we mistake our vain and deceitful knowledge for the sovereign

* When I said that our morals were corrupted, by that I did not claim to say that those of our ancestors were good, but only that ours were even worse. Among men there are a thousand sources of corruption, and while the sciences are perhaps the most abundant and the most rapid, it is hardly the case that this is the only one. The ruin of the Roman Empire, the invasions of a multitude of Barbarians, have made a mixture of all the peoples which must necessarily destroy the morals and customs of each of them. The crusades, commerce, the discovery of the Indies, navigation, long voyages, and other additional causes that I do not want to cite, have continued and augmented the disorder. Everything that facilitates communication among the various nations carries to some, not the virtues of the others but their crimes, and among all of them alters the morals that are proper to their climate and the constitution of their government. The sciences have therefore not done all the evil, they have only done their good part of it; and above all what specifically belongs to them is to have given our vices an agreeable color, a certain honest appearance that prevents us from being horrified by them. When the Play, the Wicked Man[10] was performed for the first time, I remember that it was not considered that the leading role corresponded to the title. Cleon seemed only to be an ordinary man; he was, it was said, like everybody. This abominable scoundrel, whose well developed character should have made all those who have the bad fortune to resemble him tremble within themselves, seemed a total failure as a character, and his wickedness passed for an engaging manner because those who thought themselves very honest men recognized themselves trait for trait.

intelligence which sees the truth of everything at a glance. Taken in an abstract manner, science deserves all of our admiration. The mad science of men is worthy only of scorn and disdain.

Among a people the taste for letters always proclaims a beginning of corruption which it very promptly accelerates. For this taste cannot be born in this way in a whole nation except from two bad sources which study maintains and increases in its turn, namely idleness and the desire to distinguish oneself. In a well-constituted State, each citizen has his duties to fulfill; and these important concerns are too dear to him to allow him the leisure to attend to frivolous speculations. In a well-constituted State all the citizens are so very equal, that no one can be preferred to the others as the most learned or even as the most skillful, but at most as the best: even this distinction is often dangerous; because it makes for cheats and hypocrites.

The taste for letters which is born from the desire to distinguish oneself necessarily produces ills that are infinitely more dangerous than all the good that they do is useful. In the end it makes those who surrender to it very unscrupulous about means for succeeding. The first Philosophers made a great reputation for themselves by teaching men the practice of their duties and the principles of virtue. But soon these precepts having become common, it was necessary to distinguish oneself by opening up contrary routes. Such is the origin of the absurd systems of Leucippus, Diogenes, Pyrrho, Protagoras, Lucretius. Hobbes, Mandeville and a thousand others have pretended to distinguish themselves among us; and their dangerous doctrine has borne such fruit, that although we still have some true Philosophers ardent to recall the laws of humanity and virtue to our hearts, one is surprised to see to what point our reasoning century has pushed disdain for the duties of man and of citizen in its maxims.[11]

The taste for letters, philosophy and the fine arts destroys love of our primary duties and of genuine glory. Once talents have seized the honors due to virtue, everyone wishes to be an agreeable man and no one concerns himself with being a good man. From this is born still this additional inconsistency that men are rewarded only for qualities that do not depend on them: for our talents are born with us, our virtues alone belong to us.

The first and almost the sole cares given to our education are the fruits and seeds of these ridiculous prejudices. In order to teach us to read one torments our unfortunate youth: we know all the rules of grammar before having heard about the duties of man: we know everything that has been done up to the present before we have been told a word about what

we ought to do; and as long as we practice babbling no one cares whether we know how to act or think. In a word we are urged to be learned only in things that cannot be of any use to us; and our children are reared precisely as were the ancient athletes of the public games, who, dedicating their robust limbs to a useless and superfluous exercise, kept themselves from ever using them in any profitable work.

The taste for letters, philosophy and the fine arts softens bodies and souls. Work in the study renders men delicate, weakens their temperament, and the soul retains its vigor with difficulty when the body has lost its vigor. Study uses up the machine, consumes spirits, destroys strength, enervates courage, and that alone shows sufficiently that it is not made for us. It is in this way that one becomes cowardly and pusillanimous, equally incapable of resisting pain or the passions. Everyone knows how unfit the inhabitants of cities are to sustain the toils of war and the reputation of men of letters on the score of bravery is not unknown.* Now nothing is more justly suspect than the honor of a coward.

So many reflections about the weakness of our nature often serve only to turn us away from generous undertakings. From meditating about the miseries of humanity, our imagination crushes us with their weight, and too much foresight deprives us of courage by depriving us of security. It is very much in vain that we claim to arm ourselves against unforeseen accidents, "if by trying to arm us with new defenses against natural inconveniences, science has imprinted on our fancy more deeply with their magnitude and weight, than with its own reasons and vain subtleties to protect us from them."[12]

The taste for philosophy loosens in us all the bonds of esteem and benevolence that attach men to society, and this is perhaps the most dangerous of the ills engendered by it. The charm of study soon renders any other attachment insipid. Further, by dint of reflecting on humanity, by dint of observing men, the Philosopher learns to appreciate them according to their worth, and it is difficult to have very much affection for what one holds in contempt. Soon he concentrates into his person all the interest that virtuous men share with their fellows: his contempt for others turns to the profit of his pride: his amour-propre increases in the same proportion as his indifference to the rest of the universe. For him, family, fatherland become words void of meaning: he is neither parent, nor citizen, nor man; he is a philosopher.

*Here is a modern example for those who reproach me for citing only ancient ones: The Republic of Genoa, seeking to subjugate the Corsicans more easily found no surer method than to establish an Academy among them. It would not be difficult for me to lengthen this Note, but to do so would insult the intelligence of the only Readers about whom I care.

At the same time that the cultivation of the sciences as it were withdraws the heart of the philosopher from the crowd, in another sense it involves in it that of the man of letters and in both instances with equal prejudice to virtue. Every man who occupies himself with agreeable talents wants to please, to be admired, and he wants to be admired more than others. Public applause belongs to him alone: I would say that he does everything to obtain it if he did not do still more to deprive his rivals of it. From this is born on the one side the refinements of taste and politeness; vile and base flattery, seductive, insidious, puerile efforts, which eventually shrivel the soul and corrupt the heart; and on the other side, jealousies, rivalries, the much renowned hatreds of artists, perfidious calumny, cheating, treachery, and everything most cowardly and odious belonging to vice. If the philosopher holds men in contempt, the artist soon makes himself held in contempt by them, and at last both cooperate to render them contemptible.

There is more; and of all the truths I have proposed for the consideration of the wise, this is the most surprising and the most cruel. Our Writers all regard as the masterpiece of the politics of our century the sciences, arts, luxury, commerce, laws, and the other ties which, by tightening among men the ties of society* from personal interest, put them all in mutual dependence, give them reciprocal needs, and common interests, and oblige each of them to cooperate for the happiness of the others in order to be able to attain his own. Doubtless these ideas are fine, and are presented in a favorable light. But in examining them attentively and impartially, one finds much that should be taken with a grain of salt in the advantages that they seem to present at first.

Thus it is a very marvelous thing to have made it impossible for men to live among themselves without being prejudiced against, supplanting, deceiving, betraying, mutually destroying each other! Henceforth we must beware of letting ourselves be seen as we are: for two men whose interests agree, a hundred thousand can be opposed to them, and there is in this case no other means to succeed than to deceive or ruin all these people. This is the deadly source of violence, treachery, perfidy, and all the horrors necessarily demanded by a state of things in which each—pretending to work for the fortune and reputation of the others—seeks only to raise his own above them and at their expense.

What have we gained by this? Much babble, some wealthy people,

* I complain that Philosophy relaxes the bonds of society that are formed by esteem and mutual benevolence, and I complain that the sciences, the arts, and all the other objects of commerce tighten the bonds of society based on personal interest. The fact is that one cannot tighten one of these bonds without the other being relaxed by the same amount. There is therefore nothing contradictory in this.[13]

and some argumentative people, that is to say, enemies of virtue and common sense. On the other hand, we have lost innocence and morals. The crowd crawls in misery; all are slaves of vice. Crimes not committed are already at the bottom of hearts and only the assurance of impunity is lacking for their execution.

What a strange and deadly constitution in which accumulated wealth facilitates the means of accumulating more, and in which it is impossible for those who have nothing to acquire something; in which the good man has no means of escaping from misery; in which the greatest rogues are the most honored, and in which one must necessarily renounce virtue to become an honest man! I know that the declaimers have said all this a hundred times; but they say it while declaiming, and I say it based on reasons; they have perceived the evil, and I have discovered its causes, and above all I have shown a very consoling and very useful thing by showing that all these vices do not belong so much to man as to man poorly governed.*

Such are the truths that I have developed and that I have attempted to prove in the diverse Writings that I have published on this matter. Here now are the conclusions that I have drawn from them.

Science is not at all made for man in general. He ceaselessly goes astray

*I notice that there now reigns in the world a multitude of petty maxims that seduce the simple by a false appearance of philosophy, and which, besides that, are very convenient for ending disputes with an important and decisive tone without any need for examining the question. Such is this one: "Everywhere men have the same passions: everywhere amour-propre and self-interest lead them; therefore everywhere they are the same." When Geometers have made an assumption that from reasoning to reasoning leads them to an absurdity, they go back on their steps and thus demonstrate the assumption to be false. The same method, applied to the maxim in question, would easily show its absurdity: but let us reason differently. A Savage is a man, and a European is a man. The semi-philosopher concludes immediately that one is not worth more than the other, but the philosopher says: In Europe, government, laws, customs, self-interest, all put individuals in the necessity of deceiving each other mutually and incessantly; everything makes vice a duty; it is necessary to be wicked in order to be wise, for there is no greater folly than to create the happiness of the cheaters at the expense of one's own. Among the Savages, personal interest speaks as strongly as among us, but it doesn't say the same things: love of society and the care for their common defense are the only bonds that unite them: this word of property, which costs so many crimes to our honest people, has almost no sense among them: among them they have no discussions about interest that divide them; nothing carries them to deceive one another; public esteem is the only good to which each aspires, and which they all deserve. It is very possible for a Savage to commit a bad action, but it is not possible that he take on the habit of doing evil, for that wouldn't be of any good for him. I believe that one can make a very just estimation of men's morals by the multitude of business they have among each other: the more commerce they have together, the more they admire their talents and industry, the more they trick each other decently and adroitly, and the more they are worthy of contempt. I say this with regret; the good man is the one who does not need to fool anyone, and the Savage is that man.[14]

Illum non populi fasces, non purpura Regum
Flexit, et infidos agitans discordia fratres;
Non res Romanae, perituraque regna, Neque ille
Aut doluit miserans inopem, aut invidit habenti.[15]

in its quest; and if he sometimes obtains it, it is almost always to his detriment. He is born to act and think, and not to reflect. Reflection serves only to render him unhappy without rendering him better or wiser: it makes him regret the good things of the past and prevents him from enjoying the present: it presents him the happy future to seduce him by the imagination of it and to torment him through desires and the unhappy future to make him feel it in advance. Study corrupts his morals, impairs his health, destroys his temperament, and often spoils his reason: if it teaches him something, I would consider him very poorly compensated.

I admit that there are some sublime geniuses who know how to pierce through the veils in which the truth is enveloped, some privileged souls, capable of resisting the stupidity of vanity, base jealousy, and other passions that engender the taste for letters. The small number of those who have the good fortune to combine these qualities is the light and honor of the human race; it is fitting for them alone to exert themselves in study for the benefit of everyone, and this exception even confirms the rule; for if all men were Socrates, science would not be harmful to them, but they would have no need of it.

Every people which has morals, and which consequently respects its laws and does not at all want to refine its ancient practices, ought to secure itself against the sciences, and above all against the learned, whose sententious and dogmatic maxims would soon teach it to despise its practices and its laws; which a nation can never do without being corrupted. The smallest change in customs, even if it is advantageous in certain respects, always turns to the disadvantage of morals. For customs are the morality of the people; and as soon as it ceases to respect them, it no longer has any rule except its passions nor bridle but the laws, which can sometimes hold back the wicked, but never make them good. Moreover if philosophy has once taught the people to despise its customs, it soon finds the secret of eluding its laws. Thus I say that it is the case for the morals of a people as it is for the honor of a man; it is a treasure that must be preserved, but that is no longer recovered once it has been lost.*

*I find in history a unique but striking example that seems to contradict this maxim: it is that of the foundation of Rome made by a troop of bandits, whose descendants became in a few generations the most virtuous people that has ever existed. I would not have any difficulty explaining this fact if this was the place to do so; but I will content myself with remarking that the founders of Rome were less men whose morals were corrupted than men whose morals were not yet formed; they did not scorn virtue, but they didn't know it yet; for these words *virtues* and *vices* are collective notions that are only born with frequentation among men. Moreover, from this objection one would derive a point against the sciences, for the two first Kings of Rome, who gave a form to the Republic and instituted its customs and its morals, one was occupied only with wars and the other only with sacred rites; the two things in the world that are the most distant from philosophy.[16]

But once a people has been corrupted to a certain point, whether the sciences have contributed to this or not, is it necessary to banish them or protect the people from them to render it better or to prevent it from becoming worse? This is another question about which I have positively declared for the negative. For first, since a vicious people never returns to virtue, it is not a question of rendering good those who no longer are so, but of preserving as such those who have the good fortune of being so. In the second place, the same causes which have corrupted peoples sometimes serve to prevent a greater corruption; it is in this way that someone who has spoiled his temperament by an indiscreet use of medicine, is forced to continue to have recourse to doctors to preserve his life; and it is in this way that the arts and sciences, after having hatched the vices, are necessary for keeping them from turning into crimes; at least they cover them with a varnish which does not permit the poison to find a vent so freely. They destroy virtue, but leave its public simulacrum* which is always a fine thing. They introduce into its place politeness and the proprieties, and for the fear of appearing wicked they substitute that of being ridiculous.

Thus my opinion is, and I have already said it more than once, to allow to exist and even to support carefully Academies, Colleges, Universities, Libraries, Theatres, and all the other amusements which can give some diversion to the wickedness of men, and keep them from occupying their idleness with more dangerous things. For in a country in which it is no longer a question of honest people nor of good morals, it would be better to live with rogues than with brigands.

Now I ask where the contradiction is in myself cultivating the tastes whose progress I approve? It is no longer an issue of bringing peoples to do good, it is only necessary to distract them from doing evil; it is necessary to occupy them with foolishness to turn them away from bad actions; it is necessary to amuse them instead of preaching to them. If my Writings have edified the small number of good people, I have done them all the good that depends on me, and it is perhaps still to serve them usefully to offer objects of distraction to the others which will keep them from thinking about them. I would consider myself only too happy to have a Play to be hissed every day, if at this cost I could keep in check the bad plans of a single one of the Spectators, and save the honor of the

*This simulacrum is a certain softness of morals that sometimes replaces their purity, a certain appearance of order that prevents horrible confusion, a certain admiration of beautiful things that keeps the good ones from falling completely into obscurity. It is vice that takes the mask of virtue, not as hypocrisy in order to deceive and betray, but under this lovable and sacred effigy to escape from the horror that it has of itself when it sees itself uncovered.

daughter or the wife of his friend, the secret of his confidante, or the fortune of his creditor. When there are no longer any morals, it is necessary to think only of public order; and it is known well enough that Music and Theatre are among its must important objects.

If some difficulty remains for my justification, I boldly dare to say that it is with regard neither to the public nor my adversaries; it is with regard to myself alone: for it is only by observing myself that I can judge if I ought to count myself in the small number, and if my soul is in a condition to undergo the burden of literary endeavors. I have felt their danger more than once; more than once I have abandoned them with the plan of no longer taking them up, and renouncing their seductive charm, for the peace of my heart I have sacrificed the only pleasures that gratify it. If in the languors that weigh me down, if at the end of a difficult and painful career, I have dared to take them up again for a few moments to relieve my ills, I at least believe that I have put into this neither enough interest nor enough pretension to deserve the just reproaches that I have made to men of letters in this regard.

I needed a test to complete my self-knowledge, and I took it without hesitating. After having recognized the situation of my soul in literary success, it remained for me to examine it in the reverse. Now I know how to think about it, and I can put the worst before the public. My Play had the fate that it deserved and that I had foreseen; but, aside from the boredom it caused me, I left the performance much more content with myself and more justly so than if it had succeeded.

Thus I advise those who are so eager to seek reproaches to make to me, to study my principles better and to observe my conduct better before they accuse me of inconsistency in them. If they ever perceive that I am beginning to court the favor of the public, or that I become vain from having written pretty songs, or that I blush at having written bad Plays, or that I seek to damage the glory of my rivals, or that I pretend to speak ill of the great men of my century in order to try to raise myself to their level by lowering them to mine, or that I aspire to position in an Academy, or that I go to pay court to the women who set the tone, or that I flatter the stupidity of the Great, or that ceasing to wish to live from the labor of my hands,[17] I hold in ignominy the trade that I have chosen and take steps toward wealth, in a word if they notice that the love of reputation makes me forget that of virtue, I beg them to warn me about it, and even publicly, and I promise them instantly to throw my Writings and my Books into the fire, and to concede all the errors with which they will be pleased to reproach me.

While waiting, I will write Books, compose Poems and Music, if I

have the talent, time, strength and will to do so: will continue to say very frankly all the evil that I think about letters and about those who cultivate them,* and will believe that I am not worth any less for that. It is true that it will be possible to say some day: This professed enemy of the sciences and arts, nevertheless composed and published Theatrical Plays; and this discourse will be, I admit, a very bitter satire, not on me, but on my century.

* I wonder at how much most men of letters have gone astray in this affair. When they saw that the sciences and the arts were attacked, they thought that they were being attacked personally, while without contradicting themselves they could all think like me that, whereas these things have done a great deal of evil to society, it is very essential to use them today as a medicine for the evil they have caused, or like those harmful animals that must be crushed on top of their bite. In a word, there is not a man of letters who, if in his conduct he can pass the test of the preceding passage, couldn't say in his favor what I say in my own, and this way of reasoning seems to me to suit them all the better because, among us, they care very little about the sciences provided that they continue to place the learned in honor. It is like the priests of paganism, who only supported religion as long as it made them respected.

EDITORIAL NOTES TO "Preface to Narcissus"

1. *Narcissus* was performed on December 18, 1752. For an account of its reception see *Confessions*, Book VIII (Pléiade, I, 387–388). In this context Rousseau says, "In the Preface which is one of my good writings, I began to expose my principles a little more than I had done until then." It was published in 1753. The play itself is of importance for showing Rousseau's early reflections on the issues of vanity and love.

2. In the *Confessions*, Rousseau says that, in fact, he wrote it several years later. See *Confessions*, Book III (Pléiade, I, 120). Before its performance it was touched up by Marivaux.

3. Throughout his works Rousseau very consistently distinguishes between "convincing," which produces agreement through rational argument, and "persuading," which produces agreement by an appeal to feelings or passions. For example, in Book II, chapter 7, of the *Social Contract*, he argues that the legislator must persuade the people to accept his laws because they are in no condition to be convinced by rational argument. Rousseau makes the same distinction in chapter 4 of the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* when he discusses the emotional power of the earliest human languages which could "persuade without convincing."

4. This is a paraphrase of the beginning of a speech by Johann Friedrich Burscher given in 1752.

5. See above, pp. 180–181. Note Rousseau's disingenuous implication that he was otherwise unaware of Lecat's attack, to which he had already responded.

6. Elsewhere this word is usually translated as "the learned." See note 2 to p. 96 above.

7. "Enough talking, not enough wisdom." This is Rousseau's correction. The original addition read *eloquentiae* instead of *loquentiae*, eloquence instead of talking. This original reading is a citation from Sallust's *Catiline Conspiracy*, V, 4.

8. This remark can be considered as of particular importance for considering Rousseau's abandonment of his illegitimate children because it was written only a few years after he first began to reflect seriously on this abandonment. Cf. *Confessions*, Book VIII (Pléiade, I, 356–358).

9. Compare the the formulation of the question posed by the Academy of Dijon. See p. 1 above.

10. *The Wicked Man* is a play by Gresset, first performed in 1747.

11. Leucippus and Protagoras lived during the fifth century B.C.; Diogenes the Cynic, during the fourth; Pyrrho, during the fourth and third; and Lucretius, during the first. They were atomists, skeptics, or atheists. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was the author of *Leviathan*. Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) was the author of *The Fable of the Bees*. Rousseau discusses him in the *Second Discourse*. The fact that these thinkers lived in rather separated periods indicates that Rousseau is not arguing for a simple historical decline. Furthermore, the emphasis on the consequences of the doctrines of Hobbes and Mandeville indicates that the modern project of publicizing doctrines has more widespread effects than the

mere existence of comparable doctrines in antiquity. On this point see p. 20 above.

12. Montaigne, "Of Physiognomy," *Essays*, III, 12. The word *vain* is Rousseau's addition.

13. This passage bears a striking resemblance to Burke's attack on the substitution of artificial bonds (private interest, law, and terror) for natural ones in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ironically, Burke includes Rousseau among the philosophers he holds responsible for such pernicious artifice.

14. This note outlines the core of the argument of the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.

15. "He is not swayed by the fasces of the people, nor by the King's purple, nor by the discord setting faithless brothers against each other; Nor by Roman affairs, nor realms doomed to perish. Nor does he pity in his misery the poor or envy the rich" (Virgil, *Georgics*, II, 495–499). Rousseau omits verse 497, which reads, "nor by the Dacian sweeping down from his confederate Danube."

16. See *Social Contract*, IV, ii ff., and Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 365–367.

17. This is a reference to Rousseau's profession as copyist of music.